

WAC 458-20-124 Restaurants, cocktail bars, taverns and similar businesses. (1) **Introduction.** This section explains Washington's B&O and retail sales tax applications to sales by restaurants and similar businesses.

It discusses the sales of meals, beverages and foods at prices inclusive of the retail sales tax. This section also explains how discounted and promotional meals are taxed. Persons operating restaurants and similar businesses should also refer to WAC 458-20-119 and 458-20-244. Persons who merely manage the operations of a restaurant or similar business should refer to WAC 458-20-119 to determine their tax liability. The term "restaurants, cocktail bars, taverns, and similar businesses" means every place where prepared foods and beverages are sold and served to individuals, generally for consumption on the premises where sold.

(2) **Business and occupation tax.** The tax liability of restaurants, cocktail bars, taverns and similar businesses is as follows:

(a) **Retailing.** Sales to consumers of meals and prepared foods by restaurants, cocktail bars, taverns and similar businesses are subject to the retailing tax classification. Meals provided to employees are presumed to be in exchange for services received from the employee and are retail sales and also subject to the retailing tax. (See WAC 458-20-119, Sales of meals.)

(b) **Wholesaling.** Persons making sales of prepared meals to persons who will be reselling the meals are subject to the wholesaling-other tax classification. Sellers must obtain resale certificates from their customers to support the resale nature of any transaction. (See WAC 458-20-102.)

(c) **Service.** Compensation received from owners of coin-operated machines for allowing the placement of those machines at the restaurant, cocktail bar, tavern, or similar business is subject to the service and other business activities tax. Persons operating games of chance should refer to WAC 458-20-131.

(3) **Retail sales tax.** Sales to consumers of meals and prepared foods by restaurants, cocktail bars, taverns and similar businesses are generally subject to retail sales tax. This includes the meals sold or furnished to the employees of the business. A retail sales tax exemption is available for the following sales of meals:

(a) Prepared meals sold under a state-administered nutrition program for the aged as provided for in the Older Americans Act (Public Law 95-478 Title III) and RCW 74.38.040(6);

(b) Prepared meals sold to or for senior citizens, disabled persons, or low-income persons by a not-for-profit organization organized under chapter 24.03 or 24.12 RCW;

(c) Prepared meals sold to the federal government. (See WAC 458-20-190). However, meals sold to federal employees are taxable, even if the federal employee will be reimbursed for the cost of the meals by the federal government.

(4) **Deferred sales or use tax.** If the seller fails to collect the appropriate retail sales tax, the purchaser is required to pay the deferred sales or use tax directly to the department.

(a) Purchases of dishes, kitchen utensils, linens, and items which do not become an ingredient of the meal, are subject to retail sales tax.

(b) Retail sales tax or use tax applies to purchases of equipment, repairs, appliances, and construction.

(c) The retail sales or use tax does not apply to purchases of food or beverage products which are ingredients of the meals being sold.

(d) Purchases of paper plates, paper cups, paper napkins, toothpicks, or any other articles which are furnished to customers, the first actual use of which renders such articles unfit for further use, are not subject to retail sales tax when purchased by restaurants and similar businesses making actual sales of meals.

(5) **Combination businesses.** Persons operating a combination of two kinds of food sales businesses, of which one is the sale of food for immediate consumption (i.e., a bakery selling food products ready for consumption and in bulk quantities), are required to keep their accounting records and sales

receipts segregated between taxable and tax exempt sales. Persons operating a combination business should refer to WAC 458-20-244.

(6) **Discounted meals, promotional meals, and meals given away.** Persons who sell meals on a "two for one" or similar basis are not giving away a free meal, but rather are selling two meals at a discounted price. Both the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes should be calculated on the reduced price actually received by the seller.

(a) Persons who provide meals free of charge to persons other than employees are consumers of those meals. However, certain food products are statutorily exempt of retail sales or use tax unless sold by a retail vendor where the food product must be handled by a person required to have a food handler's permit. For tax reporting periods beginning with December 1, 1993, persons operating restaurants or similar businesses, where a food handler's permit is required, will not be required to report use tax on food products given away, even if the food products are part of prepared meals. For example, a restaurant providing meals to the homeless or hot dogs free of charge to a little league team will not incur a retail sales or use tax liability with respect to these items given away. A sale has not occurred, and the food products exemption applies. Should the restaurant provide the little league team with carbonated beverages free of charge, the restaurant will incur a deferred retail sales or use tax liability with respect to those carbonated beverages. Carbonated beverages are not considered food products for the purposes of the food products exemption. (See also WAC 458-20-244 for a list of exempt food products.)

(b) Meals provided to employees are presumed to be in exchange for services received from the employee and are not considered to be given away. These meals are retail sales. (See WAC 458-20-119 on employee meals.)

(7) **Sales of meals, beverages and food at prices including sales tax.** Persons may advertise and/or sell meals, beverages, or any kind of food product at prices including sales tax. Any person electing to advertise and/or make sales in this manner must clearly indicate this pricing method on the menus and other price information.

If sales slips, sales invoices, or dinner checks are given to the customer, the sales tax must be separately stated on all such sales slips, sales invoices, or dinner checks. If not separately stated on the sales slips, sales invoices, or dinner checks, it will be presumed that retail sales tax was not collected. In such cases the measure of tax will be gross receipts. (Refer also to WAC 458-20-107.)

(8) **Class H restaurants.** Restaurants operating under the authority of a class H liquor license generally have both dining and cocktail lounge areas. Customers purchasing beverages or food in lounge areas are generally not given sales invoices, sales slips, or dinner checks, nor are they generally provided with menus.

(a) Many class H restaurants elect to sell beverages or food at prices inclusive of the sales tax in the cocktail lounge area. If this pricing method is used, notification that retail sales tax is included in the price of the beverages or foods must be posted in the lounge area in a manner and location so that customers can see the notice without entering employee work areas. It will be presumed that no retail sales tax has been collected or is included in the gross receipts when a notice is not posted and the customer does not receive a sales slip or sales invoice separately stating the retail sales tax.

(b) The election to include retail sales tax in the selling price in one area of a location does not preclude the restaurant operator from selling beverages or food at a price exclusive of sales tax in another. For example, an operator of a class H restaurant may elect to include the retail sales tax in the price charged for beverages in the lounge area, while the price charged in the dining area is exclusive of the sales tax.

(c) Class H restaurants are not required to post actual drink prices in the cocktail lounge areas. However, if actual prices are posted, the advertising requirements expressed in WAC 458-20-107 must be met.

(9) **Gratuities.** Tips or gratuities representing donations or gifts by customers under circumstances which are clearly voluntary are not part of the

selling price subject to tax. However, mandatory additions to the price by the seller, whether labeled service charges, tips, gratuities or otherwise must be included in the selling price and are subject to both the retailing B&O and retail sales taxes. (Refer also to WAC 458-20-119.)

(10) **Vending machines and amusement devices.** Persons owning and operating vending machines and amusement devices should refer to WAC 458-20-187 (Coin operated vending machines, amusement devices and service machines).

(11) **Examples.** The following examples identify a number of facts and then state a conclusion. These examples should be used only as a general guide. The tax status of each situation must be determined after a review of all of the facts and circumstances.

(a) ABC Coffee Shop has its own bakery and also a counter and tables where it sells pastries and coffee for immediate consumption. ABC also sells donuts and other bakery items for consumption off the premises. No beverages are sold in unsealed containers except for consumption on the premises. ABC accounts separately for its sales of products which are not intended for immediate consumption through a coding maintained by the cash register. ABC is operating a combination business. It is required to collect retail sales tax on items sold for consumption on the premises, but is not required to collect retail sales tax on baked goods intended for consumption off the premises.

(b) XYZ Restaurant operates both a cocktail bar and a dining area. XYZ has elected to sell drinks and appetizers in the bar at prices including the retail sales tax while selling drinks and meals served in the dining area at prices exclusive of the sales tax. There is a sign posted in the bar area advising customers that all prices include retail sales tax. Customers in the dining area are given sales invoices which separately state the retail sales tax. As an example, a typical well drink purchased in the bar for \$2.50 inclusive of the sales tax, is sold for \$2.50 plus sales tax in the dining area. The pricing requirements have been satisfied and the drink and food totals are correctly reflected on the customers' dinner checks. XYZ may factor the retail sales tax out of the cocktail bar gross receipts when determining its retailing and retail sales tax liability.

(c) RBS Restaurant operates both a cocktail bar and a dining area. RBS has elected to sell drinks at prices inclusive of retail sales tax for all areas where drinks are served. It has a sign posted to inform customers in the bar area of this fact and a statement is also on the dinner menu indicating that any charges for drinks includes retail sales tax. Dinner checks are given to customers served in the dining area which state the price of the meal exclusive of sales tax, sales tax on the meal, and the drink price including retail sales tax. Because the business has met the sign posting requirement in the bar area and has indicated on the menu that sales tax is included in the price of the drinks, RBS may factor the sales tax out of the gross receipts received from its drink sales when determining its taxable retail sales.

(d) Z Tavern sells all foods and drinks at a price inclusive of the retail sales tax. However, there is no mention of this pricing structure on its menus or reader boards. The gross receipts from Z Tavern's food and drink sales are subject to the retailing and retail sales taxes. Z Tavern has failed to meet the conditions for selling foods and drinks at prices including tax. Z Tavern may not assume that the gross receipts include any sales tax and may not factor the retail sales tax out of the gross receipts. [Statutory Authority: RCW 82.32.300. 93-23-018, ' 458-20-124, filed 11/8/93, effective 12/9/93; 83-07-034 (Order ET 83-17), ' 458-20-124, filed 3/15/83; Order ET 70-3, ' 458-20-124 (Rule 124), filed 5/29/70, effective 7/1/70.]